

102 BRITISH DIPLOMACY BEFORE
1914

As regards France no English Government would refuse military and naval aid if she were unjustly menaced and attacked. But with Russia it is quite different. With her size and her immense reserves of man-power, people believe she could victoriously resist German aggression.

Doumergue : There is a pro-German party in Russia—Witte is a member—which favours an entente at Austria's expense. If you converse with Russia, and if our three Naval General Staffs have joint discussions, Russia, finding herself tied more closely to us, would be better able to resist German approaches. Do you not think there might be an exchange of letters in which we would agree that, if one of the three countries found itself suddenly menaced, or if the general situation made it appear necessary, a conversation *a trois* would immediately take place?

Grey : I do not reject the idea, but we must proceed methodically. We could examine that after we have communicated to Russia our conversations relating to naval co-operation.

The Russians asked for it, wrote Grey afterwards, the French pressed it, and we saw no reason to refuse provided that the whole transaction was strictly within the limits laid down in the Grey-Cambon letters. It would indeed have been as difficult to decline the Russian suggestion in 1914 as to rebuff the French in 1906. Yet the proviso that expert conversations left the discretion of the Governments unimpaired failed once again to prevent enhanced expectations of support. Grey passes rather too lightly over the incident in his *Memoirs*. Our partners in the Triple Entente were delighted at the readiness with which we accepted their plan. England saw no need for an alliance, reported Benckendorff to his chief, but she realized that, if the worst

occurred, she would
none the less have to march. When the ensuing
discussions
between British and Russian naval experts
began, he joyfully
reported that the Triple Entente had at last
become a reality.
Cambon, he added, had helped with hands and
feet. The fly in
the ointment was the fact that the negotiations
were betrayed
by a member of the Russian Embassy in London,
and were
revealed by Theodor Wolff in the *Berliner
Tageblatt* at the
instance of the Wilhelmstrasse.

The story of our diplomacy in the last years of
peace as
revealed by the archives is a crescendo of
commitments. The
alliance with Japan in 1902, the promise of
diplomatic support